

Legal Environment

There are strong legal protections for media in Sweden under the Freedom of the Press Act of 1766, the first press freedom law in the world, as well as the 1991 Fundamental Law of Freedom of Expression. However, these laws criminalize expression considered to be hate speech, and prohibit threats or expressions of contempt directed against a group or member of a group. While freedom of the press in general is greatly valued in the country, there is considerable debate in Swedish media about the limits of free speech regarding contentious issues like immigration or Islam. While immigration-skeptic blogs and the right wing nationalist Sweden Democrats party decry what they see as self-censorship in the Swedish press, most of the mainstream media see criticizing immigration as a form of hate speech. In 2013, the government made it possible for police to access IP addresses in order to identify when online hate crimes occurred, and granted the Swedish Media Council SEK 1 million (\$153,000) for initiatives to combat online xenophobia, sexism, and similar forms of intolerance among youth.

The penal code criminalizes defamation, and offenders may face up to two years in prison. The editors of Swedish newspapers are accountable for all content published on the newspaper's website, including those filed in archives, and are thus legally responsible for material approved by their predecessors. In June 2014, Fredrik Vejdeland, an editor of Nordfront, a website for the extremist Swedish Resistance Movement, received a four-month prison sentence in connection to almost 30 Nordfront reader comments containing racism and hate speech. Vejdeland had originally faced a fine for a single post and a comment published on the website in June 2013, before Sweden's attorney general launched a broader case in December 2013. In 2012, the previous editor of Nordfront, Emil Hagberg, had been sentenced to a month in prison for a user comment containing hate speech and threats against Jews.

Several other legislative initiatives and cases in recent years have raised concern. In February 2013, a court of appeals upheld a 2012 verdict against the editor in chief and a news editor of the tabloid *Expressen*, who were fined for inciting a journalist to purchase illegal firearms as part of a story on the ease of obtaining weapons in Malmö. Leading journalists saw the case as government harassment and a blow to investigative reporting. In July 2013, the Shooting Prohibition Act was ratified to regulate the use of publicly taken photographs. Authorities portrayed the law as an instrument for safeguarding the integrity of private citizens, while critics raised concerns that the law can be used to hinder the work of press photographers.

The Freedom of the Press Act provides protections to journalists' sources and guarantees access to information. Swedish public bodies respect freedom of information in practice, and the government overall has exhibited high and rapid response rates to both domestic and international requests.

The self-regulatory Swedish Press Council was established in 1916 and has jurisdiction over print and online content. It consists of a judicial board as well as industry representatives and independent members. Complaints are investigated by an appointed ombudsman who can choose to dismiss them for lack of merit or forward them to the council with a recommendation to uphold. The council ultimately rules on complaints and can impose a fine of up to 30,000 kroners (\$4,400). Although the council does not have authority over broadcast media, it does operate an ethical code across all platforms. The code is applied to broadcast media by the Swedish Broadcasting Authority, which has a separate body—the Review Board—for examining the content of radio and television programs.

The Review Board issued several decisions in 2014, particularly on content considered to be partial or unbalanced. In December 2014, the board ruled that a series of news reports aired in March about wind

power in Sweden were biased and unfair in conveying a one-sided negative image of wind turbines. In November, the board ruled against Sveriges Radio (SR), finding that the station had denied a local physician's right to reply following a broadcast that criticized his treatment methods. Complaints against several programs were also dismissed in 2014. In March, the board cleared P1 Debatt, an SR program, from accusations of partiality in connection to the host's views on the Sweden Democrats party and questions of racism.

Political Environment

Physical violence and harassment directed at media workers or outlets are rare. However, Utgivarna, an interest group representing the major Swedish media publishers, held a meeting with Swedish intelligence authorities in January 2014 to discuss police protection for its members. In June, Utgivarna published a survey showing that four out of ten news outlets had received threats against their staff or property in 2013.

In March 2014, Kamil Ryba from the Swedish Defense League, a right-wing organization, received a six-month prison sentence. He had threatened the Gothenburg-based paper *GT* on two accounts, in December 2013 and January 2014, and was convicted of issuing bomb threats as well as endangering civil liberties by attempting to suppress the freedom of the press.

Economic Environment

Buoyed by a high level of readership, Sweden's newspaper market is very diverse, with many local and regional papers. The government offers subsidies to newspapers regardless of political affiliation in order to encourage competition, and media content in immigrant languages is supported by the state. Public broadcasting, consisting of Sveriges Television (SVT) and SR, has a strong presence in Sweden. Public television and radio are funded through a license fee, but there are more than 100 private radio stations, and television has considerable competition from private stations, with the main competitor being TV4. Private ownership in the broadcast sector is highly concentrated under the media companies Bonnier and the Modern Times Group.

In December 2014, the Swedish Broadcasting Authority released a report on the impact of 2008 changes to the Radio and Television Act that increased the advertising maximum to twelve minutes per hour of broadcasting. The report found that advertising investments in the media sector as a whole had changed little between 2006 and 2013. However, while spending on internet and television advertising increased substantially, spending on daily press advertising decreased.

Access to the internet is unrestricted by the government, and the medium was used by about 93 percent of the population in 2014. Since February 2013, every household that has a television receiver has had to pay an annual fee of SEK 2,076 (\$307), as required by the Act on Financing of Radio and Television. In 2014, a Swedish court ruled that computers, tablets, and mobile phones are not television transmitter devices, thus making them exempt from the fee.